**Calm in the Storm**

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At a time of challenge and fear, inner calm is vital. Sometimes media content, especially social media, gives us facts – contaminated by gossip, speculation, fears and fantasies. This tempts us into a state of shock and fear, the blame game, and the Drama Triangle of Victim, Rescuer and Persecutor. Without inner calm, heightened emotions of fear and distress can become contagious – an infection we can do without!

Our mammalian bodies have a mechanism for alarm and fear – the sympathetic nervous system (nothing to do with sympathy). This prepares us for fight or flight, from danger such as a bear or tiger chasing us. Adrenaline floods the body, heart rate rises, mouth goes dry, palms get sweaty, and we feel butterflies in our tummies.

Unfortunately, any threat or fear, real, imaginary or perceived - can put us into this state – the adrenaline surges, and we feel anxious, fearful, nervous and worried. We even choose to enjoy this state when watching some films! This state can also be infectious to others, who pick up on our fears and become fearful themselves. This is a temporary state of chaos in the system – ready for physical action! But there is rarely a tiger or a bear chasing us. (p40 in Health and Self Care)

The opposite state for the mammalian body is calm – the parasympathetic system, which is ‘Rest, digest, chill and repair’ – the long term normal, engine ticking over, maintenance state. (The autonomic nervous system consists of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems.) Cows and horses in the field, sheep grazing, cats stretched out – all are on chill, rest, digest, repair for the great majority of the time – the default mammalian state. This is the state of calm coherence in the body, the opposite of chaos. If a threat comes along, the animals go onto alarm and sympathetic drive for a few minutes, then go back to grazing. We humans, on the other hand, are often tempted into being busy, buzzing, task driven, and threat driven states, where we continue to feel anxious and distressed – chaos all the time, on perpetual alarm state of fear!

So how can we get back to the default state of calm, and calm the storm of our animal bodies’ fear that tosses us around and throws us off balance?

Simple really – how we breathe is really important. If we choose – or allow ourselves – to breathe rapidly, shallowly, irregularly and from the upper chest – then we WILL feel anxious – and stay in this state. If we choose, on the other hand, to breathe slowly, regularly, rhythmically, and from low down in the chest, using the diaphragm (the muscle that separates chest and abdominal cavities), then we WILL feel calm. Simple really – let’s just try!

You may wish to sit with your feet on the floor, spine comfortable, and rest your hands. Now, take slow, regular, rhythmic breathes in and out through your nose, right down almost to your tummy. Slow, regular, relaxed, belly breathing. And notice how you feel.

To enhance the feeling of calm you may wish to hold each thumb to little finger, and place the tip of your tongue behind your top teeth, mouth closed. For a more sophisticated CtrlAltDelete (feelings reset) to settle your feelings, interlace fingers, touch nail-base to nail-base, lightly not tightly, as many as possible, rest your hands in your lap, and carry on breathing. (see p149 in Health and Self Care [www.healthandself.care](http://www.healthandself.care) )

Please notice how you feel! Congratulations – you’ve made another deposit into the Bank of Inner Calm – and reduced the chaos that happens when fears run riot. Regular deposits into the Bank of Inner Calm helps our health in many ways – as well as making us feel better. And from a still state of inner calm, we always know what is important to do next, rather than rushing around or stuck frozen with fear.

To understand more about how the brain processes events, see the animated video on the first page of <http://www.foundationforpositivementalhealth.com/>

What else can we do besides breathing? Many people know the benefit of yoga, tai’chi, mindfulness, prayer or still space. Time in nature can be really important to help us retune when out of balance, as can time engaged in anything that interests us and keeps us present, including spending time with animals. Moving our physical body also keeps us present, and can burn off stress hormones. Even just looking at a tree or flower can help us calm – or a picture of one. Information from nature helps restore harmony, and stimulates reflection by interacting with our human software.

Peer support and debrief is really important, to help us let off steam in a safe place, and discharge stuck emotions of shock and distress, fear or frustration. So keep in contact with friends and colleagues – never more important for morale than at the present time – why not start a virtual support group?

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) has useful advice on anxiety, on panic attacks and other topics. There are various Apps we can use such as Headspace or others, also this is good: <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak> has useful information

In the line of homely remedies, some people find Rescue Remedy and other flower essences (information from nature) helpful for bringing calm, obviously these are not for any medical condition. Others find lavender oil soothing, other aromatherapy oils are also available.

You may sleep better for avoiding screen time – and the news – just before bed.

Please remember, all things pass, and our own inner calm is really important to our health – so please remember to breath, calmly, slowly and regularly – it helps!

Health journalist Sarah Stacey’s piece is well worth a read:

<https://www.beautybible.com/beauty-bible-posts/sarahs-health-notes-calming-the-storm>

Declaration of interest: Andrew is a Somerset CCG GP and GP Appraiser, and SW Clinical Lead for Practitioner Health. Andrew teaches about Health for Health Professionals, and has used and taught about many tools for health including Bach Flower Remedies for over 25 years.